Research Proposal

Re-reading Selected Marathi and Tamil Dalit Autobiographies: A Study of Oppression through *Baluta, The Outcaste, Karukku* and *VIRAMMA: life of an untouchable*

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I. Topic/ Tentative Title

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II. Introduction

'Dalit', taken from the Sanskrit term means 'crushed'. Dalit in Marathi means 'ground, broken or reduced to pieces.' Dalits are people who have a lowly, insignificant position in society living a pulverized life.

Dalits in India being marginal and sub-caste have been ostracized and subjugated at every strata of life on the basis of the Chaturvarnik caste system scripted in Vedas and Puranas. Due to the underlying notions of purity and pollution in the hierarchical social system, Dalits receive psychological, physical and spiritual traumas. The caste system reserves the top most position for the upper castes and puts Dalits at the edge; thus, keeping them deprived of socio-economic- political opportunities necessarily required for every human being's development. Dalits are victims of social, cultural, spiritual and political exclusion. They remain relegated to menial occupations and feed on the leftovers of the high caste people.

In the post- independence era, some educated untouchables started protesting and raising their voices against tribulation that they have been victims of from ages. The natural outburst of feelings and thoughts came up through their writings, having a unique form and aesthetics, developing a new genre of writing called Dalit literature. Dalit literature has been emerging and providing a new dimension and concept to literature of marginality. It aims at creating a counter culture and a separate identity for Dalits in society. The principal philosophy of Dalit literature is to bring 'total revolution' and bestow separate identity to Dalits. Dalits give literary expression to their pains and sufferings, agony and anguish through poems, songs, novels, short stories and autobiographies.

Dalit literature in its autobiographical form has a unique characteristic through which the writers confess the bitter and traumatic experiences of their lives. It provides vent to the innermost feelings of an individual and brings forth the heinous side of the

social system which never comes into the notice of the upper castes. It is a practice of self- representation where narrator expresses lived experiences and creates social identities through story telling with personal emotions and passions. Even the personal traumas that they express have the voice of entire community as a whole. It is the voice of not an individual but of entire community. Autobiographies present the lived experiences of Dalits in the natural form, unrefined. Their expression is often harsh, blunt, brutal and coarse that comes through their lives of poverty, ignorance and violence.

Therefore, four personal narratives *Baluta* the first ever written autobiography of a Marathi Male Dalit writer, *The Outcaste* which showcases post independence pains and sufferings of Dalits, *Karukku* the first autobiography of a Tamil Female Dalit writer and *VIRAMMA: life of an untouchable* the most culturally rich personal narrative have been selected. In these texts the respective authors have penned down their traumatic experiences. Since the texts are personal narratives and present an individual's story, the individual study will eventually collaborate into a comparative analysis of how the two cultures, viz. Marathi and Tamil, are different yet similar in the manner they treat Dalits respectively. It will also find its way to differentiate between men and women autobiographies.

There are twenty four concepts of life narratives given by Smith and Watson in *Reading Autobiographies* which facilitate a comprehensive understanding of such texts. These twenty four concepts include autobiographical truths like - The Autobiographical "I", Authority and Authenticity, Experience, Identity and Traumas etc. These provide intriguing facts about autobiographies and make the daunting task of understanding an autobiography easier.

Hence, the study of the aforesaid autobiographical truths will provide minute details and will help the readers understand the research findings in a more comprehensive manner.

Important Terms & Phrases

Autobiography- An account of a person's life written by that person. Autobiographies considered as a literary genre.

Caste- Each of the hereditary classes of Hindu society, distinguished by relative degrees of ritual purity or pollution and of social status. There are four basic classes or varnas in Hindu society: Brahman (priest), Kshatriya (warrior), Vaisya (merchant or farmer), and Sudra (labourer). The lowest class, the scheduled caste (formerly known as untouchables), fall outside the varna system and have historically suffered extreme discrimination.

Culture- The ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society.

Dalit- A member of the lowest caste in the traditional Indian caste system.

Memory- The faculty by which the mind stores and remembers information. Something remembered from the past.

Oppression- Prolonged cruel or unjust treatment or exercise of authority.

Puranas- Any of a class of Sanskrit sacred writings on Hindu mythology and folklore of varying date and origin, the most ancient of which dates from the 4th century AD.

Trauma- A deeply distressing or disturbing experience. Emotional shock following a stressful event or a physical injury, which may lead to long-term neurosis.

Veda- Any of the four collections forming the earliest body of Indian scripture, consisting of the Rig Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda, and Atharva Veda, which codified the ideas and practices of Vedic religion and laid down the basis of classical Hinduism. They were probably composed between 1500 and 700 BC, and contain hymns, philosophy, and guidance on ritual.

III. Review of Literature

An article by Shamna R. and Vani Devi V. entitled "Folksongs as the Sanctuary of Passionate Memories in the Autobiography of Viramma" published in *Epitome*: *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research* in June 2018 extends a deeper knowledge about cultural traits of Tamil Dalit society and helps in understanding the social, economic, political and religious life of Dalits at Karani. Viramma in her autobiography, Viramma: life of an untouchable presents the ethics, aesthetics, beliefs and logics of Tamil Dalit society. Viramma exemplified the folksongs of the village of Karani which profoundly express the common phenomena of life, ideas and

feelings of Dalits there. The folksongs are sung and enjoyed at every juncture of life as the medium of expression, starting from the birth and ending with the death providing the spontaneous outburst to feelings, joys, emotions, morals, love and even myths. The rich cultural heritage of Tamil society is presented through it

Another article provides a feminist view of Dalit writings. The article "Bama: Through A Dalit Womanist Lens" published in *International Journal of Applied Research* in 2017 by Khushee Saroha gives a great insight into the status of women in society, especially a Dalit woman and emphasis on the narrative style of Bama. It throws light on how a Dalit woman is triple marginalized on the basis of class, caste and gender. Caste subjugation, gender suppression, and class exploitation, all are linked together and create a multidimensionality and intensity of oppression, which is destructive to the experiences of Dalit women. It shows how Bama has projected her women characters that fight for their identity, rights and equality. Bama through her writings tries to achieve a specific identity for her women characters. Her Dalit women are unique in so far they do not hesitate to resist tyranny in any form, boldly oppose the dominant culture and challenges traditional evaluative norms. She empowers Dalit women through her writings to take up their rightful place in the process of building an egalitarian society.

Daya Pawar's canonical text *Baluta* traces social exclusion, marginalization and ostracization of Mahar community which makes Mahars an easy prey to social and environmental injustice. The paper "Negotiating Environmental Injustice, Caste Oppression and Dalit Politics in Daya Pawar's *Baluta*" published in *The Criterion: An International Journal for English* (2017) by Jayeeta nag manifests the malignant impact of castism on Dalits and shows dehumanized status of Dalits in society. The very existence of Dalit community is rendered as pollutant. They were refrained to touch common well and are also castigated from entering into temples. The social marginalization begins its journey since nativity. The text highlights the list of names that inarguably proclaim the downtrodden people's ignominious existence. The pitiful status of women in the light of Baluta is well explained in this paper. Mahar women receive trenchant oppression at the hands of their counterparts. They are doubly colonized. First by their inmates and secondly by the rich people. The vulnerability of

Mahar women is brought into force by deftly handling and portraying the wretched condition of Taibai.

The research paper "Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste* (Akkarmashi): Portrayal of A Dalit's Life" published in *IJELR* (2016) by Ajeet Dehariya portrays the life of Dalits in the light of Limbale's *The Outcaste.* It offers a whole spectrum of insight into the caste system of India, social hierarchy and hypocrisies which put the untouchables at the lowest place in social order and forced them to live a life of exploitation, degradation and humiliation. The quest for identity and economic deprivation are the major issues which have been discussed in the text. The Dalits are landless and follow the traditional occupation, which hinders any kind of economic upliftment. By prevailing oppression, Dalits have to face hunger and starvation. It can be proclaimed that *The Outcaste* highlights the hypocrisies and mentality of the upper caste and gives a full description of the sufferings and humiliations of the lower and suppressed caste. This autobiography is the awakening consciousness of Dalit identities from his marginalization. Through his work he calls for the humanism, humanity for Dalits and wants to establish an egalitarian society which is casteless and classless.

In the article "Finding textual space: study of two Dalit autobiographies; *THE OUTCASTE* by Limbale and *MOTHER FOREST* by C.K.Janu" published in *Research Journal of English Language and Literature* (2015), Soya Joseph highlights illegitimacy as a curse in the society, though illegitimate relation between a Dalit woman and upper class Patil is quite acceptable by society. It highlights the quest for identity of the narrator as he was born illegitimate which makes his identity fractured and thus makes him Akkarmashi: The Outcaste. Due to this sexual politics he has no sense of belongingness to his home or place. He struggles hard for smooth integration with society but because of his illegitimacy he has to bear insult every time. Major problems of community like alcoholism, theft, sexual exploitation, hunger, poverty, caste- centered approach and hegemonic values of society are highlighted through this article. The another study is of *Mother Forest*, which is the life account of C.K. Janu born in Kerala. She highlights interference of the civilized society which snatched their life, culture, nature and soil. Due to Zemindari system and role of political parties, the real owners of land became mere dependants. The text also highlights

government policies for the upliftment of Adivasis and non implementation of distribution of land.

The paper concludes by drawing some similarities and dissimilarities between the above two autobiographies. The cultural humiliation, inferiority, physically, mentally and socially exploitation of Dalits is more barbaric in other states than Kerala. As Kerala is more literate state than other but the economic and political conditions of both the regions are the same way pathetic.

The paper by S. Pandit Kamble entitled "Problems and issues of Dalit women reflected in Dalit Autobiographies" published in *Human Rights International Research Journal* (2014) helps in understand several problems and issues of Dalit women in selected autobiographies. It describes the pathetic condition of Dalit women, their revolution against the well established caste system of India and the norms of impurity and pollution imposed by Hindu tradition. The paper also talks about Daya Pawar's *Baluta* which pictures a story of a mother who beyond all odds raises her child as an educated one. Though it is a patriarchal system where men are heads of family but it is the women who have to wear pants and bear all responsibilities to run house hold. It shows how a Dalit woman holds the lowest position in the social order that she is not even considered as a human being. The circumstances make her easy prey of exploitation at all bases that, to do compromise is the only choice left to her. It reveals the hidden part of society where a woman undergoes with struggle, pain, trauma, identity quest, hunger and physical exploitation.

The essay "Beyond the Margin: Dalit Women's Autobiographies" published in *Dalit Personal Narratives* (2010) by Raj Kumar highlights how Dalit women writings is a different genre as it is personal narrative of triple marginalized Dalit women writers. The essay examines Sumitra Bhave's *Pan On Fire*, Bama's *Karukku*, Viramma's *Life- story of an Untouchable* and some autobiographical extracts of Shantabai Kamble, Kumud Pawde and Urmila Pawar. It makes it clear that how the issues related to Dalit women could not become the part of early Dalit writings. The first generation of Dalit writers, who all men were, ignored issues related to Dalit women in their writing, And the few who wrote, presented them with all positive qualities. Thus realism was absent in their writings. It is only when Dalit women take their pens

and wrote about their positions in their families and communities, and then only women- related issues got highlighted in Dalit literature. They wrote critically about violence in Dalit families, Dalit patriarchy in Dalit communities, deprivation of several opportunities including getting an education, poverty, humiliation, sexual tyranny and struggle for recognition, freedom and social injustices. These writings are precise efforts to present their lives and a revolutionary step to have an individual identity from just adhering to a social role.

Another essay titled "The Marginal Self: A Dalit Men's Autobiographies" in *Dalit Personal Narratives* (2010) analyses many autobiographies like Hazari's *Untouchable: The Autobiography of an Indian Outcaste*, James M. Freeman's *Untouchable: An Indian Life History*, D.P.Das' *The Untouchable Story*, Balwant Singh's *An Untouchable in the IAS*, D.R. Jatav's *A Silent Soldier: An Autobiography* , Shyamlal's *Untold story of a Bhangi Vice- Chancellor*, Laxman Mane's *Upara*, Sharan Kumar Limbale's *The Outcaste*, Narendra Jadhav's *Outcaste: A Memoir*, Vasant Moon's *Growing Up Untouchable in India*, Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* and Laxman Gaikwad's *The Branded* to help in understand how Dalit autobiographies are different from non- Dalit autobiographies. Firstly, it identifies the basic reason of writing an autobiography. It proclaims that the autobiography written by upper caste Indian men are to celebrate their 'self' and success. On the other hand, Dalits have used the autobiographical mode to justify their neglected selves. They want to achieve identity for themselves as well as for their entire community through their writings. The non- Dalit autobiographers generally start with their genealogy taking pride in their birth. But, the Dalit autobiographies show their quest for identity. They are at the bottom of the social order and are so subjugated by social system that they cannot take pride of, even if they want. Most of the non- Dalit autobiographers have a good status and class in society. While, Dalit autobiographers have come from poor and illiterate untouchable families. They must be praised for narrating their personal accounts most vividly without any praise and prejudice. The upper caste autobiographies end with a note of assertion and satisfaction, while almost all the non Dalit autobiographies end at an indecisive mode, still making them feel untouchable, insecure and threatened by caste politics.

IV. Relevance

Indian social canvas is painted with different colors of castes. Some colors that are bright and have dominant sects, make their existence clear with the religion. While, some are faded, though supporting the brighter ones in their existence but are still at the edge and neglected. These are the down trodden people of society, the broken class under caste system called Untouchables, Ati- Shudra, Outcastes, Depressed Classes, Harijan, Scheduled Castes or Dalits.

After independence, Dalits came up with their own kind of protest literature which portrays the realities of their rustic lives. It follows the language and dialect of their own people and expresses their anguish and agony without refining them. Dalit Autobiographies, a self narrative form of writing has been contributing widely in putting forth their pain and sufferings.

Through the reviews it becomes clear that the subsequent research only shows the conditions of Dalits and its deep rooted cause in our Vedas and Puranas but doesn't insist on how this oppression affects their entire life. The study pertains to either individual study of male or female autobiographies but doesn't compare how the experiences of a Male Dalit differ from those of a Female Dalit. It also shows cross culture study and the role played by the Cultural, Political and Religious factors in oppression of Dalits, using some autobiographies but doesn't pertain to the texts which have been selected.

Through this study, the autobiographies *The Outcaste, Baluta, Karukku* and *Viramma: life of an untouchable* will be better understood in the light of Smith & Watson's *Reading Autobiography* which will help future researchers to read an autobiography on the ground of autobiographical truths. It will also enable deeper explanation to differences and similarities how the two cultures i.e. Marathi and Tamil treat Dalits. It will provide more understanding and clarity about the subjugation and atrocities faced by Dalits. Factor study of the culture, social, religious and other aspects will bring out the multiple effects of oppression. The study through the perspective of trauma theory will add more in understanding memories, introspection, retrospection, foreshadow, flashback and awful remembrances that are colored by pain and sufferings.

Dalit writing is about sharing the experiences and concerns which articulates emotions, pains, humiliation, resentment, anger and resistance. It has been emerged out of transformation in social life. Such writings have always opened up discursive space for negotiating issues of untouchability and oppression.

Therefore, the study intends to find out what sort of atrocities Dalits have been facing, how oppression affects them at every strata of life, how Male and Female Dalits write about similar experiences yet differently on gender exploitation, how Dalits whether Marathi or Tamil are exploited, but in a different manner because of culture and region and to what extent Autobiographical Truths are available in the selected texts.

V. Objectives

The study examines autobiographies of two Marathi Dalit male writers and two Tamil Dalit female writers. It goes into deeper explanation of the selected personal narratives to showcase the lives of Dalits under the well established caste system of India and the norms of impurity and pollution imposed by Hindu tradition. Thus the study has the following objectives:

- To focus on Dalit lives and the atrocities faced by them
- To analyze the various effects of oppression on Dalits
- To examine how the regional changes affect the level of oppression and its expression in Dalit writing
- To show how personal narratives are instrumental and perennial to vent out frustration
- To bring out distinguish features of the autobiographical form
- To study Autobiographical Truths in *The Outcaste, Baluta, Karukku* and *Viramma: life of an untouchable* in the light of Smith & Watson's *Reading Autobiography*
- To portray a distinction between Marathi and Tamil Dalit culture
- To do a comparative study between Male and Female Dalit autobiographies

VI. Methodology

In order to pursue the research proposal in the area 'Re-reading Selected Tamil and Marathi Dalit Autobiographies: A Study of Oppression through *The Outcaste, Baluta, Karukku* and *VIRAMMA: life of an untouchable'* the methods that will be applied to study the selected texts will include close reading, critical analysis, narrative techniques, interpreting and comparing/ contrasting the primary sources chosen for study. The respective texts would be read in the light of background to the texts, plot construction, atrocities faced by the Dalits, various kinds of oppression, effects of oppression and the Social, Political and Religious factors that make their lives a living death.

For a better understanding of autobiographies the texts will also be studied against the twenty four concepts of life narratives given by Smith and Watson which are - Agency, Audience and Addressee, Authority and Authenticity, Authorship and the Historical Moment, The Autobiographical "I", Autographics, Body and Embodiment, Coherence and Closure, Collaborative Autobiography, Ethics, Evidence, Experience, History of Reading Publics, Identity, Knowledge and Self- Knowledge, Memory, Narrative Plotting and Modes, Online Lives, Paratexts, Relationality, Space and Place, Temporality, Trauma and Scriptotherapy, and Voice.

They will also be studied through the angle of trauma theory, theory of subaltern, Post- colonial and Blacks theory. It will also bring up the issues of feminine studies.

VII. Tentative Chapterization

Chapter I – Introduction

The first chapter will focus on the age/ time when a new genre called 'Dalit Literature' came into existence. It will explore the origin of the term 'Dalit'. In the context of the selected texts it will discuss the authors, the era they wrote in, the narrative style that they used and the experiences that they had. It will also explore autobiographical truths given by Smith & Watson's *'Reading Autobiography'* and the subsequent research that has already been done in the area through review of literature.

Chapter II – *Baluta*: An evocative record of Caste Politics

The second chapter will study the first Dalit autobiography *Baluta* by Daya Pawar. It will provide a background to the text and its plot. Further, it will focus upon how the narrator and his entire community have been facing atrocities. It will research various kinds of oppression like physical, emotional, spiritual, cultural, political, economical etc. and their effects on Dalits. The factor study will provide a new perspective to it. The text will also be studied in the frame work of Autobiographical truths which will facilitate deeper understanding to the personal narrative.

Chapter III – *The Outcaste*: An Emotionally Violent autobiography of a Half- Caste

The third chapter will study *The Outcaste* by Sharankumar Limbale. It portrays trauma of an 'Aakarmashi' who is born illegitimate, as his mother was a Dalit and father was an upper caste Patil. It will provide a background to the text and its plot. Further, it will focus upon how the narrator and his entire community have been facing atrocities. It will research various kinds of oppression like physical, emotional, spiritual, cultural, political, economical etc. and their effects on Dalits. The factor study will provide a new perspective to it. The text will also be studied in the frame work of Autobiographical truths which will facilitate deeper understanding to the personal narrative.

Chapter IV- *Karukku*: A means of Healing the Inward Wounds

The fourth chapter will study the first autobiography of a Tamil Female Dalit writer *Karukku* by Bama. It will provide a background to the text along with its plot and highlights the religious trauma of Christian Dalits. Further, it will focus upon how a Dalit woman is triple marginalized on the basis of Caste, Class and Gender. It will research various kinds of oppression like physical, emotional, spiritual, cultural, political, economical etc. and their effects on Dalits. The factor study will provide a new perspective to it. The text will also be studied in the frame work of Autobiographical truths which will facilitate deeper understanding to the personal narrative.

Chapter V- *VIRAMMA: life of an untouchable* : An Intensely personal and moving Self- Portrait

The fifth chapter will study the most culturally rich autobiography of a Tamil Female Dalit writer *Viramma: life of an untouchable* by Viramma. It will provide a background to the text along with its plot and highlights the rich culture of Tamil Dalit society. It will focus upon their myths, beliefs, rituals and norms. Further, it will explore the atrocities which they are victim of from ages. It will research various kinds of oppression like physical, emotional, spiritual, cultural, political, economical etc. and their effects on Dalits. The factor study will provide a new perspective to it. The text will also be studied in the frame work of Autobiographical truths which will facilitate deeper understanding to the personal narrative.

Chapter VI - Conclusion

The sixth and the last chapter will begin with certain similarities and differences that will be observed between the selected texts. As the two of the texts i.e. Baluta and The Outcaste are of Marathi Male Dalit writers and the rest are of Tamil Female Dalit writers, they showcase their experiences that are similar at certain perspectives and are different at gender exploitation. It will also explore how Marathi and Tamil Dalits are exploited differently because of culture and region, how the regional changes affect the level of oppression and its expression in Dalit writings.

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